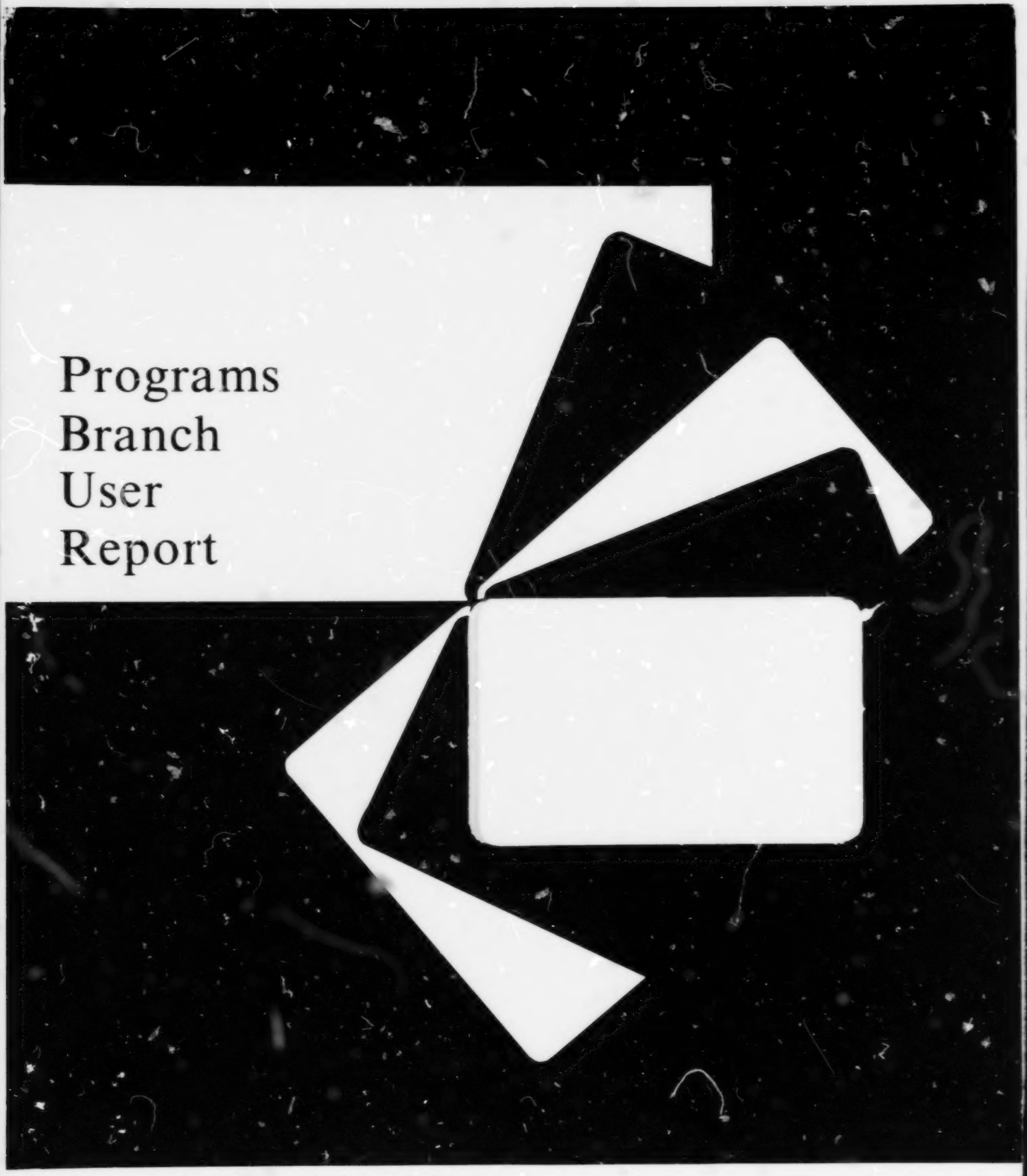
Programs Branch User Report



Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada

Secretariat

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THE CONVENIENCE STORE ROBBERY PREVENTION PROGRAM: HANDBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS

No. 1985-41

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This working paper is available in French. Ce document de travail est disponible en Français.

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- In April of 1984 Barbara Turnball, of Ontario, was shot during the robbery of a convenience store while she was working. She is now confined to a wheelchair for life (CBC FM, April, 29, 1984).
- In Montreal, robbery of convenience stores has become so serious that "according to Guy Dumont, the president of the (convenient store) association, ...about 225 or 25% of Montreal's variety store owners now own guns to defend themselves" (Globe and Mail, Jan., 30, 1984).
- In Vancouver, from May 1981 to May 1984, convenience stores were the second most frequently victimized business in the city (Vancouver City Police Crime Statistics, 1981-1984).
- Robbery, in general, is the second most prevalent form of violent crime in Canada today (Statistics Canada, Crime and Traffic Enforcement Statistics, Annual Catalogue #85-205).

CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?

YES.

HAS ANYTHING BEEN DONE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?

YES.

DOES IT WORK?

YES.

The following information is based on an evaluation of the Robbery Information Program and a Robbery Prevention Kit developed for convenience stores in Vancouver, B.C. The study was conducted between May 1, 1981 and May 30, 1984. The program was administered by the Vancouver City police and was funded primarily by the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

We have attempted, through a series of questions and answers, to provide some guidelines on how to introduce a similar program in your area.

The Vancouver Robbery Information Program

During the late 1970's, the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada expressed concern over the increasing number of convenience store robberies that were taking place throughout the country. The Ministry launched a major study to examine the problem. In the course of the study, it was noted that the 7-Eleven store Robbery Information Program (RIP) and Robbery Prevention Kit (RPK) which were developed in the United States by Southland Corporation, owners of 7-Eleven, had met with apparent success. The Ministry decided to adopt the seven step robbery prevention procedure advocated by Southland Corporation.

In May of 1981, after consultation with Southland Corporation, the Vancouver City Police Department (VPD) adopted their own Robbery Information Program and Robbery Prevention Kit.

The major reason for the introduction of the RIP in Vancouver was the Chinese business community's concern over the number of convenience store armed robberies in their community. They had approached the Vancouver Police Community Relations Section in the hope that an appropriate program could be developed to suit the needs of their community. At that time, no formal program for small businesses existed.

After several months of meetings with members of the Chinese Business Community, Chinese Benevolent Association, and the Southland Corporation, the Vancouver Police produced the RIP and the RPK.

Five primary objectives were identified for adopting the RIP and RPK. The objectives of the project were:

1. To reduce, or possibly eliminate, the violence that can occur during the commission of an offence such as robbery.
2. To make the business community more aware of the fact that there are certain things that they can do to protect themselves.
3. To prevent further victimization of members of the community.
4. To provide guidance for potential robbery victims with regard to dealing with difficulties which may arise from a robbery.
5. To help generate better relations between the community and police.

These objectives were aimed at meeting the primary goal of the program - that is, to deal with the problem of robbery and violence before the fact.

Robbery Prevention Kit (RPK)

WHO IS THE KIT FOR?

The Robbery Prevention Kit is designed for owners and employees of convenience stores.

WHAT INFORMATION DOES THE KIT PROVIDE?

The information contained in the kit describes the following procedures:

1. Steps which store operators can take in order to prevent a robbery (e.g., lowering amount of cash in the till, making minor physical alterations to the store such as lowering shelf height, using viewing mirrors, etc.).
2. Steps which store operators can take during a robbery (e.g., stay calm; do what the robber says) to reduce the risk of injury.
3. Steps which store operators can take after a robbery has occurred (e.g., call the police; write or draw a description of the robber; close the store) to increase the opportunity of identifying and possibly apprehending the robber(s).

WHAT IS IN THE KIT?

The contents of the kit are very simple and explicitly laid out, with each item serving a specific purpose. As with many primary crime prevention techniques, much of the kit relies upon principles of prevention through environmental design. For example, the Robbery Information

"Fact Book" strongly advocates the use of bright interior and exterior lighting.

The following is a list of the contents of the kit, with a brief explanation of the purpose of each item:

1. Kit Folder - holds the items of the kit.[1]
2. Robbery Prevention Standards posters - seven basic robbery prevention standards are briefly explained in point form on a poster. The poster is designed to be placed somewhere convenient for store employees so as to act as a reminder of the basic measures they should maintain in an attempt to prevent a robbery.
3. Robbery Prevention Procedures poster - this poster contains the basic "Do's" and "Don'ts" in the event of a robbery. It is designed with the intention of helping to reduce any unnecessary violence during the event of a robbery.
4. Emergency Numbers decal - this small sticker is designed to enable store operators to fill in the necessary emergency numbers (police and ambulance). The sticker is intended to be placed on or near a phone so that store employees have quick access to the numbers.

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[1] The contents of the Vancouver Kit are almost identical to the Southland Robbery Prevention Kit. Some of the differences lie in the colour scheme and the logo. Vancouver Police have adopted their own colours (blue and white) and have used the Solicitor General's "Working Together to Prevent Crime" logo. The RCMP, on the other hand, use a black and yellow scheme.

5. "No 10's" and "No 20's" decals - these are bright red and white stickers. They are designed to be placed near or inside the cash register. The stickers are intended to advertise to potential robbers that the register contains a limited amount of cash.
6. "In Case of Robbery Form" Description Sheet - this is an eyewitness description form which the store clerk can fill out after the robbery. By completing the form, the clerk is able to describe the robber for the police. The forms can be later used as evidence. The forms are intended to aid the police in their investigation process. The forms have been designed so that they can also be used as evidence in Court. The forms should be kept close to the register.
7. Height Tape - this tape guage provides for measurements of up to six feet and is to be placed inside door frames or at a convenient viewing spot so that the employee can judge the patron's height. The tape is brightly colour coded to facilitate the store clerk's estimate the height of the robber, or a suspicious person.
8. Push-Pull decals - these decals are to be placed either on the front door (preferable since they would be more noticeable there) or front window. The decal which says "Robbery Prevention Program in Effect Here" is designed to advertise to would-be robbers that measures have been

taken by the store to prevent a robbery. (See Appendix for a sample of the components in the RPK).

9. Robbery Prevention Fact Book - this booklet, designed for store employees, provides some facts on security precautions, burglary security, robbery prevention procedures, and violence prevention procedures. [2]

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[2]The "Robbery Prevention Fact Book" is also offered in Cantonese, since a large proportion of the convenience store owners in Vancouver speak Cantonese.

A Guide to your own Robbery Prevention Program

The following section will provide, through a series of questions and answers, guidelines for developing your own robbery information program. The guidelines are based primarily on the results of the Vancouver study, as well as on discussions with several nearby police detachments which are considering or are already using a similar program.

WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SEMINARS?

Given that the local police are the most familiar with crime prevention concepts and that they are generally better able to answer related crime problem/prevention questions, it is desirable for them to conduct the seminars. Support and assistance from local business associations, however, is encouraged to reflect community support.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE GENERAL PURPOSE OF THE SEMINARS?

The general purpose of the programs should be four fold:

1. To educate store operators regarding low-cost effective robbery prevention strategies.
2. To reduce the risk of injury or violence to store operators in the event of a robbery.
3. To increase community awareness and safety.
4. To promote good relations between the police and small businesses.

WHAT GENERAL TOPICS SHOULD BE COVERED?

General topics that should be covered in the seminars include:

1. Extent of crime in the city.
2. Extent of convenience store robberies in the city.
3. Purpose of the project.
4. How to make use of the Robbery Prevention Kit.
5. Importance of compliance with the RIP and the RPK.
6. General discussion of the concerns of store operators.

WHERE CAN THE ROBBERY INFORMATION SEMINARS BE HELD?

The seminars can be held at hotels, halls, community centers or wherever is most convenient for the merchants involved.

WHEN SHOULD SEMINARS BE HELD?

Seminars should be held during the evening hours so that a greater number of store merchants can attend. In the Vancouver study, some of the seminars were conducted during the day, but attendance was greatest for those seminars held in the evening--often late evening (after 10 PM).

HOW LONG SHOULD A SEMINAR LAST?

Because many of those stores which might participate do not have extra staff to keep the store open while owners attend a seminar, it is suggested that the seminars be held during the evening. They should not last more than two hours because of the time commitment required for these busy

businesses.

HOW MANY STORES SHOULD BE PARTICIPATING?

In order for the program to be effective, it is not so important to involve every store as it is to have those stores which do participate to comply fully with the program. If funds are restricted, then program efforts should be concentrated in those areas of town which experience the highest risk of being robbed. (Research has shown that certain areas may be more prone to robberies than others based on various environmental factors. This information is fairly readily available through surveying police investigation reports).

HOW CAN THE PRESENTATIONS BE INITIATED?

Initially, attempts should be made to deliver the RIP and RPK on an individual basis as requested, or as seen necessary by the police. This would allow for closer surveillance of the stores and would provide the police with an opportunity to ensure all the RPK items are appropriately placed. This approach, however, could prove to be relatively inefficient in larger metropolitan areas because of the personnel needed to cover all the stores. In such instances, seminars can and have been initiated through three major channels:

1. Police Initiation: The officers from the Community Crime Prevention Unit could encourage merchants, through

form letters and/or advertisements in local newspapers, to attend the robbery seminars. Priority could be given to those areas which the police and research identify as having the most robberies (high risk areas).

2. Community Initiation: If a community group believes that its members are prime targets for robberies, or simply want to be informed about robbery prevention measures, they can contact the police and arrangements could be made for a seminar presentation.
3. Business Associations: In some areas, stores may be affiliated with a local business association. The association could be used as a vehicle to identify interested areas and promote participation in and compliance with the RIP.

WHAT GENERAL FORMAT SHOULD THE SEMINARS TAKE?

While seminars can be conducted in a variety of manners, the following suggestions which are based on experimentation with the Vancouver RIP were found to be the most effective.

The seminars should open with a discussion of the seriousness of crime, in general, and convenience store robberies, in particular. Time should also be spent during the introduction on discussing how the seminar could help the operators make easy and economical changes to their store which would reduce their risk of being robbed. A

seminar could be structued as follows:

1. Slide Presentation on Robbery: The Vancouver City police's slide presentation lasts approximately 20 minutes. The slides focus on why the program should be adopted, how it can be implemented, as well as how certain simple physical modifications to the store (e.g., lower shelves, improve lighting, clear windows, etc.) can be taken to help reduce a store's risk of becomming a potential victim of a robbery. The slide show and its accompanying audio tape are available in either English or Cantonese. Since there is a very small French population in the city a French version was not produced. Package slide presentations are available by contacting the Crime Prevention Unit of the Vancouver City Police. The cost is approximately $4.00. A private firm, "Agency Press", with affiliates across the country can have the kits produced locally.
2. Robbery Prevention Kit: A sample of the kit should be displayed and discussed in detail. Each item in the kit should be shown and an explanation given as to its purpose and usefulness. (See Appendix for a description and sample of the items).
3. Weapons Display: An assortment of weapons (e.g., pistols, revolvers, rifles, and shotguns) should be available for display so as to familiarize the merchants

with what they could be up against in the event of a robbery. If confronted with any such weapon, safety is the main concern of the victim.

4. Mock Robbery: Depending on the type of audience and time available, a mock robbery could be staged or a short film of a mock bank robbery shown. A robbery film is available upon request from the Crime Prevention Unit of the Vancouver City police for approximately $100. After viewing the film, participants can fill out an eyewitness description form which is identical to the ones in the kit. This would help to show the participants how to use the description forms as well as to stress the importance of accuracy. Through feedback discussions of what people described on their respective forms, it can then be shown how easy it is to arrive at very different descriptions. This exercise would serve to emphasize the importance of using the forms and completing them as soon as possible and without any assistance.

5. Open Discussion Period: A seminar should conclude with an open discussion period about any specific aspects of the program or related business concerns. At the end of the robbery seminars, a certificate along with the RPK can be distributed to each participant as a token of appreciation and with the hope that they will comply

with the program and use ALL the items in the kit.

IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE STORES TO PAY FOR THE KIT?

No, it is not necessary to have the stores pay for the kit. It may be possible for the police department, with assistance from the local business association and federal or provincial government, to subsidize the costs of printing the packages. They can be reproduced relatively inexpensively. Costs in Vancouver ranged from approximately five to eight dollars per kit.

HOW CAN THE PREVENTION PACKAGE BE PRODUCED?

Since the RIP and RPK have already been developed through the assistance of a proven program elsewhere, the package could be readily adopted and modified to meet local needs. Such changes could include, for example, changing city or town logo, altering the color scheme, offering the package in several languages (e.g., Cantonese, French), and including extra copies of certain forms (e.g., description sheets).

HOW DOES ONE OBTAIN THE ROBBERY PREVENTION KIT?

A kit can usually be obtained through any major RCMP detachment across the country. Virtually all participating areas use the same kit. The only major difference between the kits is the name of the city on the door decal and on the eyewitness description sheet. If there is no RCMP detachment in your area, or they do not participate in the robbery prevention program, you can order a kit from the

Vancouver City Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit at 312 Main St., Vancouver, B.C. V6A 2T2. (tel. 604-665-2207).

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC 'THINGS' TO WATCH FOR?

Based on the findings of the Vancouver study, we have identified a number of issues which should receive careful attention if a similar program is to be implemented in your area. They include:

1. General compliance: The extent to which the program succeeds or fails is largely determined by the participants' compliance with the program. Police have an ideal opportunity to promote good relations by taking the time to visit merchants. The police can assist them with implementing the suggestions of the RPK and ensuring that merchants are using all of the Kit contents correctly. Although attendance at the Vancouver RIP was good and the response of the merchants was considered fairly positive, a majority of the stores failed to implement even a few of the suggested simple changes to their stores (e.g., putting on the Push-Pull decals or posting the Standards and Procedures decals).
2. Ethnic perceptual variations: Given the diversity of ethnic backgrounds of those who own, or are employed in many convenience stores, it is suspected that cultural practices and beliefs may affect the reporting levels as

well as the general attitudes toward the program and the police. The extent to which this problem exists is not known.

3. Language barriers: Many of the convenience stores are operated by individuals whose command of the English language is poor enough to deter them from calling the police for assistance after being robbed. Although presentations were offered in Cantonese, the decals which are supposed to be used, are in English. The Standards and Procedures decals, for example, were only printed in English. Therefore, for the store owners and operators who do not have a good command of the English language, the eyewitness description forms and information decals as they are presently printed are of limited use.
4. RIP attendance: Regardless of how much time is spent on advertising the seminars some people would not attend the seminars. They either did not have enough time (family operated business; long hours of operation) or they were reluctant to close the store and lose extra business or they simply had no interest or personal investment in the store (apathy).
5. Practical compliance problems: For some store merchants, a number of suggestions of the RIP are rather difficult to carry out. Many stores, for example, are cramped for

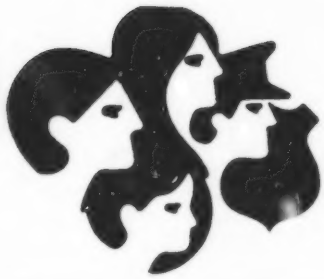
space and do not want to sacrifice merchandise space in order to comply with the RIP recommendations. By lowering the shelves, for example, some merchants feel that there would be fewer products available for their customers and a resultant loss of customers and revenue. Furthermore, some stores like to advertise sales and since the store front is often quite small, the signs limit visibility from the outside. Also, many stores which were built ten to twenty years ago were simply not designed with crime prevention concepts in mind. Many do not have large picture windows to allow easy surveillance from the street. The owners are reluctant to invest money in costly renovations to the interiors of their stores even if it might deter robberies.

More information on the evaluation of the Robbery Information Program in Vancouver can be obtained from the Program Branch, Research Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General, 340 Laurier Ave. W., Ottawa, Ontario K1A OP8. (613) 995-4811.

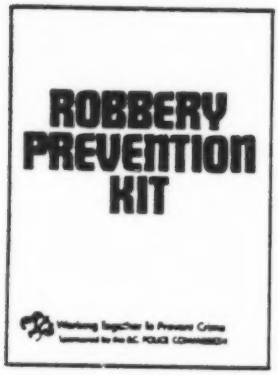
APPENDIX

CONTENTS - ROBBERY PREVENTION KIT

CONTENTS
ROBBERY PREVENTION KIT



The contents of this kit should be placed throughout the store in accordance with the guidelines below. The kit folder, fill in the blanks, and emergency phone numbers should be kept in a standard location.

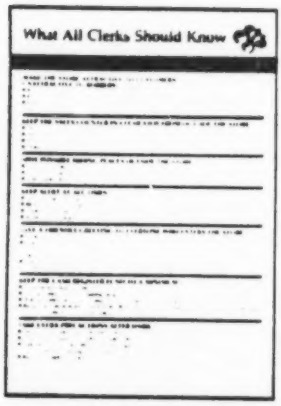


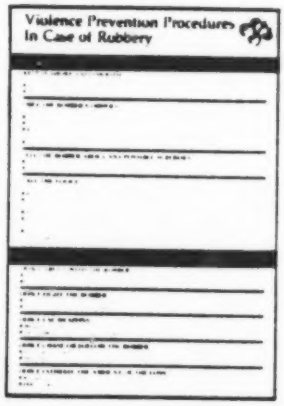
Kit Folder

One per kit.

Size: 9" x 12" folded.

Placement suggestions: In a standard location.





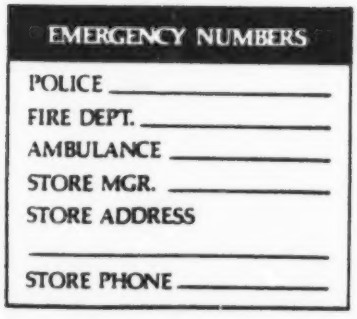
Robbery Prevention Standards Decal
Robbery Prevention Procedures Decal

One each per kit.

Size: 12" x 17".

Placement suggestions: In restroom or between restrooms.

Application instructions: Clean a smooth and flat area for the signs. Remove the protective paper backing gradually while squeegeeing the sign into position with a credit card or similar tool.



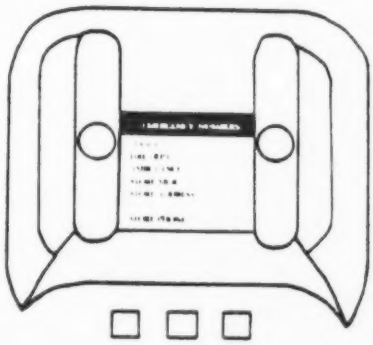
Emergency Numbers Decal

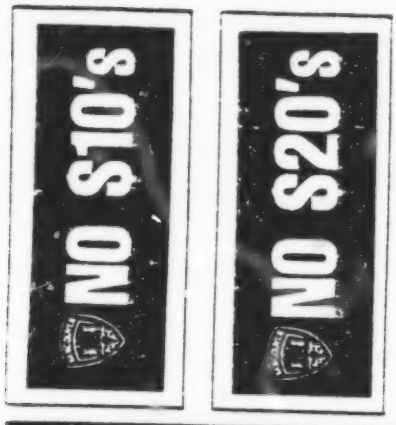
One per kit.

Size: 2" x 2".

Placement suggestions: On or near phone.

Application instructions: Clean the area. Remove the protective paper backing. Firmly rub into position, using credit card, taking special care to get edges down tight.





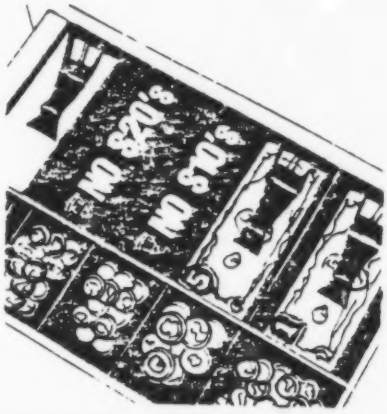
No $10's and No $20's Decals

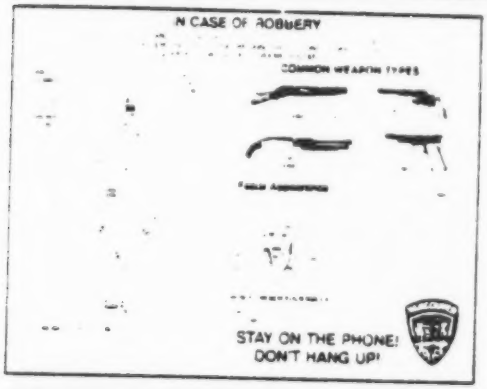
Two each per kit.

Size: 6⅛" x 2⅝".

Placement suggestions: In appropriate till spaces.

Application instructions: Clean the area. Remove protective paper backing. Firmly rub into position, using credit card, taking special care to get the edges down tight.





In Case of Robbery Form

Five per kit.

Size: 8½" x 11"

How to use: Fill in the blanks description form to be filled out by clerk after robbery and given to police.

Measuring Gauge

Two gauges per kit.

These gauges will allow clerk to accurately estimate robber's or suspicious person's height.

Placement instructions: Inside door frames.

Application instructions: Clean the area. Remove inch or so of backing paper from top of sign only. Align to door, making sure 6-foot mark is at the proper height. Remove rest of backing paper. Using credit card, apply gauge.

Push-Pull Decals

One each per kit.

Size: 11" x 4".

Placement instructions: On inside of doors, place decals so that the sides with adhesive backing face outside the store. Decal A should be placed on left-hand door, positioning it so that its right-hand edge is against door frame and its bottom edge is approximately 2" above crashbar. Decal B should be placed on right-hand door in the same way.

Application instructions: Thoroughly clean the glass. Remove part of the backing paper. Apply the exposed adhesive using credit card. Gradually remove the rest of the backing while applying the decal.